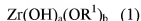


**AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS**

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

**Listing of Claims:**

1. (Withdrawn) A method for preparing an ester condensate, wherein an esterification reaction is carried out using a catalyst containing a zirconium (IV) compound and/or a hafnium(IV) compound and an iron(III) compound and/or a gallium(III) compound.
2. (Withdrawn- currently amended) The method for preparing an ester condensate according to claim 1, wherein the zirconium (IV) compound is a compound represented by a general formula (1):



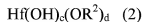
[[()]]wherein,  $\text{R}^1$  represents an acyl group or an alkyl group[[,]]; and each of a and b is 0 or any one of integers of 1 to 4; and the relationship of  $a + b = 4$  is satisfied[[()]].

3. (Withdrawn- currently amended) The method for preparing an ester condensate according to claim 1, wherein the zirconium (IV) compound is a compound represented by a general formula (3):



[[()]]wherein, X represents a halogen atom[[,]]; Y represents tetrahydrofuran[[,]]; and e represents 0 or 2[[()]].

4. (Withdrawn- currently amended) The method for preparing an ester condensate according to claim 1, wherein the hafnium (IV) compound is a compound represented by a general formula (2):



[[()]]wherein,  $\text{R}^2$  represents an acyl group or an alkyl group[[, and]]; each of c and d is 0 or any one of integers [[of]] 1 to 4; and the relationship of  $c + d = 4$  is satisfied[[()]].

5. (Withdrawn- currently amended) The method for preparing an ester condensate according to claim 1, wherein the hafnium (IV) compound is a compound represented by a general formula (4):



[[([)]]wherein, X represents a halogen atom[[.]]; Y represents tetrahydrofuran[[.]]; and f represents 0 or 2[[([)]].

6. (Withdrawn) The method for preparing an ester condensate according to any one of claims 1 to 5, wherein the iron compound is iron(III) alkoxide, and the gallium compound is gallium(III) alkoxide.
7. (Withdrawn- currently amended) The method for preparing an ester condensate according to any one of claims 1 to [[6]] 5, wherein the abundance of the iron compound is 5 mol% or more in relation to the zirconium (IV) compound and/or the hafnium (IV) compound.
8. (Withdrawn- currently amended) The method for preparing an ester condensate according to any one of claims 1 to [[7]] 5, wherein the esterification reaction is carried out by heating to reflux with a solvent, and removing azeotropic water from a reaction system.
9. (Withdrawn) The method for preparing an ester condensate according to claim 8, wherein a nonpolar or a low-polar solvent is used as the solvent.
10. (Withdrawn) The method for preparing an ester condensate according to claim 9, wherein the nonpolar or the low-polar solvent is one or more of solvents selected from the group of toluene, xylene, mesitylene, or anisole.
11. (Withdrawn- currently amended) The method for preparing an ester condensate according to any one of claims 1 to [[10]] 5, wherein an ionic liquid is added to the reaction system after the esterification reaction is finished, ester is obtained from an organic layer, and then an ionic liquid layer per se is used as a catalytic solution.

12. (Withdrawn) The method for preparing an ester condensate according to claim 11, wherein the ionic liquid is 1-butyl-3-methyl imidazolium trifluoromethanesulfonimide, 1-ethyl-3-methylimidazolium trifluoromethanesulfonate.
13. (Withdrawn- currently amended) The method for preparing an ester condensate according to claim 11, wherein the ionic liquid is N- alkylpyridinium [[trifluoromethane sulfonate imide]] trifluoromethane sulfonate imide.
14. (Withdrawn- currently amended) The method for preparing an ester condensate according to any one of claims 1 to [[10]] 5, wherein a hydrochloric acid aqueous solution is added to the reaction system after the esterification reaction is finished, ester is obtained from an organic layer, and then an aqueous layer per se is used as a catalytic solution.
15. (Withdrawn- currently amended) The method for preparing an ester condensate according to [[any one of]] claim[[s]] 11 [[to 14]], wherein the low-polar organic solvent such as toluene and heptane is used as the solvent.
16. (Withdrawn- currently amended) The method for preparing an ester condensate according to any one of claims 1 to [[15]] 5, wherein the esterification reaction is a reaction of carboxylic acid and alcohol.
17. (Currently amended) A catalyst for preparing an ester condensate, comprising: [[which is used in the esterification reaction and which contains]] a zirconium (IV) compound and/or a hafnium (IV) compound, and an iron compound and/or a gallium compound.
18. (Currently amended) The catalyst for preparing an ester condensate according to claim 17, wherein the zirconium (IV) compound is a compound represented by a general formula (1):
 
$$\text{Zr}(\text{OH})_a(\text{OR}^1)_b \quad (1)$$

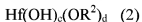
[[([)]wherein, R<sup>1</sup> represents an acyl group or an alkyl group[[, and]], each of a and b is 0 or any one of integers [[of]] 1 to 4, and the relationship of a + b = 4 is satisfied[[)]].

19. (Currently amended) The catalyst for preparing an ester condensate according to claim 17, wherein the zirconium (IV) compound is a compound represented by a general formula (3):



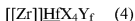
[[()]]wherein, X represents a halogen atom[[,]]; Y represents tetrahydrofuran[[,]]; and e represents 0 or 2 [[()]].

20. (Withdrawn- currently amended) The catalyst for preparing an ester condensate according to claim 17, wherein the hafnium (IV) compound is a compound represented by a general formula (2):



[[()]]wherein, R<sup>2</sup> represents an acyl group or an alkyl group[[, and]]; each of c and d is 0 or any one of integers [[of]] 1 to 4; and the relationship of c + d = 4 is satisfied[[()]].

21. (Withdrawn- currently amended) The catalyst for preparing an ester condensate according to claim 17, wherein the hafnium (IV) compound is a compound represented by a general formula (4):



[[()]]wherein, X represents a halogen atom[[,]]; Y represents tetrahydrofuran[[,]]; and f represents 0 or 2[[()]].

22. (Currently amended) The catalyst for preparing an ester condensate according to any one of claims 17 to [[21]] 19, wherein the iron compound is iron(III) alkoxide, and the gallium compound is gallium(III) alkoxide.
23. (Currently amended) The catalyst for preparing an ester condensate according to any one of claims 17 to [[22]] 19, wherein an abundance of the iron compound is 5 mol% or more in relation to the zirconium (IV) compound and/or the hafnium (IV) compound.
24. (Currently amended) The catalyst for preparing an ester condensate according to any one of claims 17 to [[23]] 19, wherein an ionic liquid is added to the reaction system after the esterification reaction is finished, ester is obtained from an organic layer, and then an ionic liquid layer per se is used.

25. (Original) The catalyst for preparing an ester condensate according to claim 24, wherein the ionic liquid is 1-butyl-3-methyl imidazolium trifluoromethanesulfonimide, 1-ethyl-3-methylimidazolium trifluoromethanesulfonate.
26. (Currently amended) The catalyst for preparing an ester condensate according to claim 24, wherein the ionic liquid is N-alkylpyridinium  
[[trifluoromethane sulfonate imide]] trifluoromethane sulfonate imide.
27. (Currently amended) The catalyst for preparing an ester condensate according to any one of claims 17 to [[21]] 19, wherein a hydrochloric acid aqueous solution is added to the reaction system after the esterification reaction is finished, ester is obtained from an organic layer, and then an aqueous layer per se is used as a catalytic solution.
28. (Currently amended) The catalyst for preparing an ester condensate according to any one of claims 17 to [[27]] 19, wherein the esterification reaction is a reaction of carboxylic acid and alcohol.